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ABSTRACT

Subjects were ninth graders in a highly competitive midwestern suburban school. All subjects had attended school in the district for their entire education. The "average" group of 49 students was compared with the "high ability" group of 124 students. Results were analyzed to determine whether differences were statistically significant. It was found that a competitive, suburban school environment with a large population of highly intelligent students has an adverse effect on the school adjustment of average ability students. Average ability females had poorer attitudes toward school, both males and females had poorer study habits, females had greater absences, and both average ability males and females were lower than a comparison group in reading and mathematics achievement. (Author)

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The School Adjustment of Adolescents with Average Intellectual Abiltiy in a Higher Ability Suburban School District

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A suburban school environment with a large population of competitive, highly intelligent students has an adverse effect on the school adjustment of average ability students who have experienced this environment during their school careers.

Average ability students had poorer school adjustment when compared to a higher ability group. Females had poorer attitudes toward school while both males and females had poorer study habits. Only females had greater absences. Both average ability males and females were lower than a comparison group in reading and mathematics achievement.

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The School Adjustment of Adolescents with Average Intellectual Ability in a High Ability Suburban School District

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The influence of a high ability suburban school district on the school adjustment of adolescents, with average mental ability, who had lived in the community and attended its schools all their lives was examined in this study. In the district the average IQ is 116, the standard deveiation 12. Ninety-five percent of the high school graduates attend some postsecondary institution.

School adjustment was defined in terms of attitudes toward schools and study methods as measured by the California Survey of Study Methods (1958), the number of days absent during the 8th grade, grade point average in 8th grade English and Mathematics, and Reading and Mathematics test scores from the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress (1957).

As reinforcers of certain behavior, as models of imitation and identification, as a group pressuring adolescents to modify their behavior, an adolescent's peers are agents of socialization. Peers, parents, siblings, and teachers are the "significant others" that influence the adolescent's self concept. Frustration at school can lead to feelings of inadequacy, which in turn can lead to lower achievement that might otherwise be higher. In a study of what young people regard as their good and bad qualities, Jersild (1952) found that students from the elementary school through college frequently referred to their work and progress at school. At most grade levels from the third grade through high school, more mentioned school success when they described what they liked most about themselves. In the high school sample Jersild found one-fourth of them mentioned difficulty at school when they described what they disliked about themselves.

Two groups were identified to determine if academic competition does in fact influence school adjustment. An "Average Ability" group, average on the national norms of the School and College Ability Test (1957) was compared to a "Higher Ability" group which was average on the suburban norms. The national mean converted scores for the "Average Ability" group was 277 with a standard deviation of 3.38. The scores ranged from one-third standard deviation above and

below the mean. The "Higher Ability" group had a mean converted score of 290 with a standard deviation of 2.57 and their scores ranged within one-third standard deviation above and below the suburban mean.

Method

Subjects were adolescents in the ninth grade of a midwestern suburban school who had attended schools in the district for all of their education. This insured that all subjects experienced the same educational environment throughout their school careers. Of the 152 students (73 males and 79 females) who met the criteria of average mental ability 26 males and 23 females attended the district schools for all of their academic careers. Of the 324 students (151 males and 173 females) who met the criteria for the comparison group, 50 males and 74 females had attended all nine years. Comparisons between the two groups were made by sex using a two tailed "t" test and a level of .05 for determining if differences were statistically significant.

Results and Discussion

A lifetime of educational competition with highly intelligent peers affects the school adjustment of average ability females in a high ability suburban school district more adversely than average ability males. Females expressed significantly poorer attitudes toward school and had poorer study habits compared to the higher ability females. Differences were significant at the .01 level. These findings indicate that average ability females are not self assured about academic activities and are not effective in their use of study methods such as note taking, using outlines, memorization, and reviewing when compared to higher ability females. There were no significant differences in attitudes toward school between average and higher ability males, but there were differences in study methods that were significant at the .05 level.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

Average ability females but not their male counterparts had significantly more absences during the 8th grade when compared to the higher ability groups. Average ability females were absent an average of 9.02 days while the higher ability females were absent 4.97 days. This difference was significant at the .05 level. Average ability males had an average absence of 5.75 days compared to 7.44 days for the higher ability males. This difference is not statistically significant.

Insert Table 3 about here

Both males and females of average mental ability were significantly lower than the higher ability groups on both teacher grades and achievement test scores. Grade point averages in the 8th grade English for average ability females were 1.78, for males 1.23, while higher ability females had grade point averages of 2.73 and males 2.00. In 8th grade mathematics average ability females had grade point averages of 1.26; males 1.46 while higher ability females had 2.34 and males 2.30. All of these differences were significant at the .01 level.

Insert Tables 4 and 5 about here

Average ability males and females earned significantly lower achievement test scores on STEP Reading and Mathematics compared to the higher ability groups. These differences were significant at the .001 level.

Insert Tables 6 and 7 about here

These findings of poorer school adjustment for average ability students suggests that such factors as rigorous competition with peers of higher ability, failure to meet parental demands for higher grades, and a failure to meet group standards of achievement do lead to negative attitudes toward school, inefficient

study methods, greater absence and poorer achievement. Average ability females tend to be more adversely affected than males. They express poorer attitudes and study methods and are absent more often, while both males and females have lower achievement. The finding that females express greater dissatisfaction with school may be explained by the fact that dissatisfied adolescent girls are more intrapunitive while males are more critical and blame others for their dissatisfaction. These findings by Getzels and Jackson (1957) suggest that females are more likely to blame themselves for poorer school adjustment while males may not internalize the feelings, but rather project their feelings on others.

The implications of these findings for suburban schools are that more resources should be put in the counseling and guidance at an early age for average ability students to help them understand and accept themselves and to develop better study skills. Teachers should be encouraged to understand the importance of intellectual competition on school adjustment and evaluation should be based on individual growth standards rather than on group standards.

References

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Table 1

Differences Among Lower and Higher Ability Students in Male, Female and Total Groups with Respect to Attitudes Toward School

Higher ability group			Lower ability group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	47.07	Male	26	45.00	2.07	.782 n.s.
Female	23	50.65	Female	23	42.00	8.65	2.92**
Total	49	48.75	Total	49	43.59	5.16	2.71**

** Significant at the .01 level.

Table 2

Differences Among Lower and Higher Ability Students in Male, Female and Total Groups with Respect to Total Study Habits

Higher ability group			Lower ability group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	51.34	Male	26	45.30	6.04	2.46*
Female	23	53.86	Female	23	44.69	9.17	3.42**
Total	49	52.53	Total	49	45.02	7.51	4.10***

* Significant at the .02 level

** Significant at the .01 level

*** Significant at the .001 level

Table 3

Differences Among Lower and Higher Ability Students in Male, Female and Total Groups with Respect to Days Absent

Higher ability group			Lower ability group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	7.44	Male	26	5.75	1.69	1.15 n.s.
Female	23	4.97	Female	23	9.02	4.05	2.30*
Total	49	6.28	Total	49	7.28	1.00	.084 n.s.

* Significant beyond the .05 level

Table 4

Differences Among Lower and Higher Ability Students in Male, Female and Total Groups with Respect to Second Semester English Grade Point Average

Higher ability group			Lower ability group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	2.00	Male	26	1.23	.77	3.58***
Female	23	2.73	Female	23	1.78	.95	3.33**
Total	49	2.34	Total	49	1.48	.86	4.15***

** Significant beyond the .01 level.

*** Significant beyond the .001 level.

Table 5

Differences Among Lower and Higher Ability Students in Male, Female and Total Groups with Respect to Second Semester Mathematics Grade Point Average

Higher ability group			Lower ability group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	2.30	Male	26	1.46	.84	4.80***
Female	23	2.34	Female	23	1.26	1.08	4.59***
Total	49	2.32	Total	49	1.36	.96	6.76***

*** Significant at the .001 level.

Table 6

Differences Among Lower and Higher Ability Students in Male, Female, and Total Groups with Respect to STEP Reading

Higher ability group			Lower ability group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	291.57	Male	26	277.84	13.73	5.55***
Female	23	297.60	Female	23	285.13	12.47	4.81***
Total	49	294.40	Total	49	281.26	13.14	7.06***

*** Significant at the .001 level.

Table 7

Differences Among Lower and Higher Ability Students in Male, Female, and Total Groups with Respect to STEP Mathematics

Higher ability group			Lower ability group				
	N	Mean		N	Mean	D	t
Male	26	281.11	Male	26	268.07	13.04	5.98***
Female	23	277.30	Female	23	265.30	12.00	4.89***
Total	49	279.32	Total	49	266.75	12.57	7.71***

*** Significant beyond the .001 level.